



Tracing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Great Britain

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- John Wycliff – published the New Testament Bible into English
- William Tyndale – follows up with the complete Bible publication—disseminating copies from Germany to England.
- At the martyrdom of Tyndale (1536), he, in the act of dying declared, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” Next year, in 1537, Henry VIII approves the printing of the English Bible!
- Bible printing in English, and other native languages, plus the subsequent Martin Luther-led Protestant Reformation in Europe, ignites Great Britain into a firestorm of Reform and subsequent Protestantism and the resultant expose’ of *all* Biblical ‘stories of Jesus’, thus strengthening conversion to the Christian way.
- This wave of Reform, paved the way for a fertile environment for the Gospel Restoration in 1830.
- The Great Reformation created a fertile environment for the missionary planting of the seeds of the restored Gospel in England, Wales and Scotland, especially from 1837 to 1851.
- Some early Church converts on average aligned or joined with at least 5 other religions before joining the Church—strongly suggesting they were “searching for the truth”.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint British branch membership records may begin from as early as 1837, which often give birth information, including: parents’ names, birthplace, etc.

BRITAIN’S EARLY CHURCH HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Preston was known anciently by the Romans as “Priest town”. By 1837, it was one of the most religiously diverse towns in just about all of England. First Missionaries began proselytizing on 19 July 1837 at Preston, Lancashire.

What other significant event began at this time? A: the Government-sponsored Civil Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths began, 1 July 1837.

The Britain of those days was ripe for a message of hope, and the preaching of the Restored Church of Jesus Christ was timely. By June 1842 there were 8,245 members of the Church in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Six years later there were about 20,000. Fourteen years of missionary labors by 1851 brought a total in England of about 44,000 early Church members, Wales had 5,244, Scotland had 3,291, and Ireland had 160—a total of about 51,000—and an additional 11,000 [sic] had supposedly emigrated to America previously! There were more members of the Church in the British Isles than there were in the whole 1850 population of the Utah Territory (11,714)!

For example, Mary Ann (Pressdee) Phillips –

- born 1773, Leigh, Worcestershire
- Baptized by Elder Wilford Woodruff – 1840, Herefordshire
- Emigrated to Utah in 1850
- Buried Davis County, 1871 – age 98

CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCHING EARLY BRITISH SAINTS

Did you know that—

- Many (but not all) aligned themselves with up to as many as 6 other religious denominations (Nonconformist churches) *before* joining the Church!
- 36% of big city early Church members were born in that city; 64% were born out in the countryside (but some of them later migrated into big cities)
- After conversion, it took early Church member ancestors an average of 13 years to save-up to emigrate to Great Salt Lake Valley—up until the Perpetual Emigration Fund (1856);
- After the P.E.F. (Perpetual Emigration Fund) took full effect by 1850 many were able to emigrate within 2 years after baptism
- Eighty percent (80%) of early Church members came from working class society; 20 percent were middle class
- Most working-class Saints prior to 1850 for ~9-12 years had to save monies in order to emigrate, may have attended several early Church branches. So here is a step by step for finding them:
 1. Use census records if possible, to find them.
 2. Then use the Reference Aid—“LDS in Britain” (see <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/150018-redirect>) to locate by map, the nearest branch[es].
 3. Church members, can search most branch records online now in digital format. Go to: <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/section/library?lang=eng> and type [with correct spelling] [name of the] branch and then type the word, “Branch” next to it. Then click “Digital”

Many England members became ‘lost’—who never emigrated, or, otherwise never made it to Salt Lake Valley

- Many families can be identified in Civil Registrations of BMDs by Mormon-ish given names like: Nephi, Moroni, Brigham, Heber, Hyrum, Parley, Orson, etc
- FamilySearch’s Family Tree (FT) is the key place to begin searching or locating many early Church ancestors - ~85% coverage
- Early Church convert ancestors’ names have recently been (mostly) indexed from Great Britain Church records (including “living” baptisms), but many have not yet been published in the Family Tree; a pre-1907 indexing project has been in-process and is nearing completion.
- Some died—waiting in England to emigrate, or on the high seas, or on the plains or via epidemics (cholera at St Louis, Winter Quarters, etc). Until 1851, nearly 50% of children died
- Some early members when coming to America, left the Church due to persecution, and some joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
- Of those choosing to remain: some left the Church due to inactivity, lack of nurturing after local church leaders emigrated, or were “cut-off” (apostatized).

- Some emigrants decided to move on to other climes and places rather than Salt Lake Valley, ignoring Prophetic counsel. For example: the lure of goldfields, offers of property in new townships and boom town speculations, 'greener' pastures (versus the Salt Lake Valley), the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ-divide. Note: Many of these "lost" former members have not yet received all their Temple ordinances.

QUICK REFERENCE TOOLS FOR LOCATING CHURCH BRANCHES

Some reference tools for locating early Church branches in 19th Century Great Britain include:

1. *Imperial Gazetteer of England & Wales* – www.visionofbritain.org.uk/expertsearch
2. *LDS In Britain* (FHL British Reference book 942 D24L, Ref. shelf #332) – county maps; digital access

The FHL British register book contains Church Branch names:

- Alpha-arranged by country; then by county; then name of township/parish
 - County maps showing towns with branches in highlight
 - Lists all Church branches (by number) within county borders
 - Lists microfilm[s] for each Church branch in Great Britain
3. Church History Library online Catalog at www.churchhistorycatalog.lds.org– type only the name of town and the word "branch"; has some branch records that the Family History Library does not have. Search under the 1) town name, and 2) the word "branch"

Early Church Branch Membership Records –

British counties with highest number of Church branches (congregations) include—

- **London (55)**
- **Lancashire (48)**
- **Yorkshire (42)**
- **County Durham (28)**
- **Lincolnshire (20)**
- **Gloucestershire (23)**
- **Glamorganshire, Wales (22)**
- **Derbyshire (21)**
- **Cheshire (20)**
- **Kent (28)**
- **Monmouthshire (20)**
- **Lanarkshire, Scotland (19)**
- **Nottinghamshire (19)**
- **Sussex (19)**
- **Essex (17)**
- **Staffordshire (17)**
- **Hertfordshire (13)**
- **Fifeshire, Scotland (13)**
- **Ayrshire, Scotland (12)**
- **Herefordshire (3+)**

Church Branch Membership records – in United States—

- **Winter Quarters, NE** (22 wards) – see Church History Department (CHD)
- **Missouri Valley branches** - ~15 branches – see Church History Department (CHD)
- **Nauvoo, IL** - ~10-20+ branches(?)
- **St Louis, MO** – Note: hundreds of deaths in 1849 “cholera” epidemic
- All the above are found in the Church History Library’s collection (see online catalog). Type only the name of branch town and the word “Branch” to find in their catalog.
- Family History Library – its online catalog – Church branch membership records are available only on microfilm, be certain to search under the town or parish name, and under the words, “[Name of] Town, “Records of Members” or “Conference”: at www.familysearch.org/catalog

MORE AND LESSER USED ONLINE “LOCATE” RESOURCES & TOOLS

Here are some popular and lesser-known Online resources and finding tools for identifying early Church converts:

1. **Civil registration** (see www.FreeBMD.org.uk or especially www.gro.gov.uk) - search for both the surname and the mother’s maiden name (if known; if it’s not, search FreeBMD for the marriage which gives the maiden name)
2. **Mormon Migration (Index):** Brigham Young University’s History department has compiled an excellent online database of early Church emigrants from especially Great Britain during the 19th century. <http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/>
3. **Minnie Margett’s File** – 1839-1913
4. **Early Church Information File (ECIF) - 1830-1900-** Images of index cards in alphabetical order for some early members of the Church. The names on the cards come primarily from the following sources:
 - Church branch records (some, not most)
 - Journals/diaries
 - Biographies
 - Cemetery records
 - Immigration records

ECIF is comprised of published books and the best available databases, online Collection totals 1,091,919 viewable images. This collection (the Early Church Information File (ECIF)- 1830-1900 card index images now online (alpha-arranged) may be viewed online at: <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/2078505>

5. **Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Index** – see <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel>; a significant database for finding early pioneers’ background
 6. **Worldwide LDS Ship Register** - Margery Taylor, former FHL research consultant (retired) compiled this excellent resource that lists from 1840 to 1913, Saints’ immigrant ships (many British) and their sailing dates and ports of arrival into the United States, including FHL film numbers to each ship’s passenger list/port arrival date here in

the United States. See either--FHL book US/Can 289.309 T216w or, FHL film US/Can # 1592753 Item 1

7. **Crossing the Ocean Index, 1840-1869**

(https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/331055?availability=Family_History_Library; click the little camera icon to view digital images) – an emigrant Church

members' roster and voyage history with compiled sources is comprised of the following:

- Mormon passenger ship lists (1840-1850 and 1857-1860)
- Mormon passenger ship lists
- Books with Mormon emigrants
- Perpetual Emigration Fund emigrants
- Handcart pioneers (1856-1860)
- Mormon pioneers memorialized with Sons of Utah Pioneers
- Emigrants on the ship "Brooklyn" and Australian ships

8. **Saints by Sea** – online database (BYU) – with over 90,000 emigrants to the United States during the 19th century. Visit: <https://saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu>

9. **The Church History Library Records** - (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) holds all branch/ward member records, journals/diaries, plus some excellent records collections (only some of which have never been indexed), and each of which relate to or are attached to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (P.E.F.). These records include the following books/registers:

- Penny File Books
- Blotter Registers
- P.E.F. (Perpetual Emigrating Fund) Ledger Books (4 volumes)
- (Finance) Journals
- Penny Fund Donations Book
- 1842 Nauvoo Census (see also FHL book 977.343/K2n)
- Law of the Lord Books

See the Church History Library's online Catalog at: <http://churchhistorycatalog.lds.org>

10. **United States Census Records** - Search ALL United States Census records for duration of your ancestor's life, because one or more might—

- Provide the specific place of birth
- Name[s] of parents and siblings and/or other relatives
- Approximate year of birth (based on age)

11. **Church Ward or Branch records** - may include:

1. (Specific) Place of birth
2. Name[s] of parents, including mother's maiden name
3. Date of birth
4. Place of baptism and confirmation
5. Last residence
6. Where moved to
7. Place of (current) residence
8. Names of siblings

12. **United States Death Certificates post-1890** - may call for and include the following critical information:

- Date of birth
- (Specific) Place of birth

- Given names of parents
 - Maiden surname of mother
13. The Church History Library's online catalog provides a number of records pertaining to the Church Perpetual Emigration Fund, some of which have been digitized and viewable online! Since many Saints participated in this funding scheme to the United States, there's strong likelihood a British emigrant ancestor name appears in some or many of these related records, with occasional additional clues about them. Here's a link to some of these records:
- https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/search/Perpetual_emigration_fund

RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR TRACING EARLY BRITISH CHURCH CONVERTS

1. Use census records to obtain a baseline or the framework of the individual and family
2. Use Civil Registrations of births, marriages and deaths indexes — (especially General Register Office, FreeBMD)
3. Use parish and church registers to find baptisms/marriages and burials/deaths for all family members
4. Use the Family Tree to find what data is already found about the person
5. Use Early Church Information File
6. Use Overland Emigration
7. Minnie Margett's index
8. United States Federal Census records

Other Considerations

A majority of early British Church converts have their origination in England's north country. Most ancient parishes in England's northern counties of Yorkshire, Cheshire, and especially Lancashire have numerous smaller (satellite) Church of England units called chapelries which subdivide each parish—and which kept their own baptisms, burials and sometimes, marriage registers. Many researchers do not know about these smaller chapels of ease, because they're oft times un-mentioned. Go to https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page to find out more about them and for links to online church baptisms, marriages and burials for them (type name of parish/town). Since the majority of our English ancestors were baptized in the Church of England prior to the Restoration, identifying all chapelries is critical to locating ancestors' origins and other events in these counties.

Some early Church convert ancestors associated with as many as five or more Nonconformist denominations

See FamilySearch Catalog for available church registers/records of each Nonconformist denomination. Search the FamilySearch Catalog under the name of the parish township or city where your ancestor resided:

www.familysearch.org/catalog. Most registers have been indexed by FamilySearch.org.

Nonconformists and Their Church Registers of Baptisms, Marriages, etc. — which include many early Church members:

Online databases for Nonconformists are located at the following websites:

1. FamilySearch.org - databases are searchable online under the name of parish
2. BMDRegisters.co.uk
3. theGenealogist.co.uk (see above)
4. Ancestry.co.uk – has some nonconformist church registers indexed and online
5. findmypast.co.uk – has some online offerings
6. Google to find online data offerings for single church denominations in a locality

Tools that aid in locating all churches (including both Church of England chapelries and Nonconformist—and including the “Latter-day Saints” [sic] branch congregations in each township parish, are as follows:

1. www.wiki.familysearch.org – lookup by parish or township name
2. England Jurisdictions Project (Maps): see www.maps.familysearch.org
3. Lewis’ *Topographical Dictionary of England* – provides an 1848 historical snapshot of ecclesiastical jurisdictions and tells what churches existed in each place at that time; is online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue.aspx> (1848)
4. John Wilson’s *Imperial Gazetteer of England & Wales* – online at <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/expertsearch#tab03>, like #3 above but instead gives a historical snapshot for the year 1870)
5. Donald Steel’s *National Index of Parish Registers* vols 1-12; see FHL book call #942 D2ste vol I-XII; digitized and available for some volumes at www.familysearch.org/catalog; use “Keyword” search to find available online volumes.
6. Church History Library online catalog – key tool for identifying all available branch records for the British Isles.
7. www.familysearch.org/catalog – provides film call numbers to most (not all) branch records